

Washington Focus:

Mideast Disappointing K

By CHARLES BARTLETT

WASHINGTON: Exultation is a passing luxury in the Cold War but the West cannot avoid at least a flush of satisfaction at the discomfiting reversals which the Soviet Union has suffered in Middle East revolutions.

The region seemed to beckon to the Communists with the decline in American prestige that followed John Foster Dulles' abrupt rejection of the Aswan Dam project in 1955 and the Iraq revolt of 1958, which took that pivotal country out of the Western alliance.



BARTLETT

The Aswan incident, plus the West's refusal to sell arms to Premier Nasser, created a mood in Cairo which gave the Kremlin reason to believe it could tie the Egyptian government closely to its purposes.

Fortunately, Nasser proved reluctant to be swallowed by his Communist benefactors. Moving severely against the Communist Party in Egypt, he imprisoned some and excluded others from influence, even in the labor organizations.

Gen. Kassem's advent to power in Iraq in 1958 offered an appealing opportunity for the Communists. He proved an easy foil and in 1958 the Soviet Union could clearly have imposed a dummy regime and absorbed Iraq into the bloc.

It was a tempting opportunity that offered the long-sought port on the Persian Gulf and a prospect of isolating Iraq and pinching Turkey. But perceiving the danger that the thrust would impair Soviet identification with the nationalist movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America, Khrushchev decided against it.

He chose instead to support Kassem against joining Nasser in the United Arab Republic. This decision brought him and the Egyptians to the point of public mutual charges of imperialistic designs in the Mideast. The relationship with Egypt cooled as an era of close dealings between Moscow and Baghdad commended. In April 1959, after the... of the... described the...

situation in Iraq as "the most dangerous in the world today."

The Iraq adventure was patterned like a new and more respectable style of encroachment. The local party was played down and the prime relationship was government-to-government. Technicians and credit amounting to an estimated \$450,000,000 were applied to orient Iraq's economy and military toward Russia.

But Kassem proved a poor bet and his involvement with the Soviets toppled him on Feb. 8.

As the new Revolutionary Council moved into power, the local Communists attempted a counter revolution. They have since paid a heavy and continuing price in executions and repression which the Central Committee in Moscow has plaintively decried as "criminal action committed in an atmosphere of anti-Communist hysteria."

Thus rebuffed in Iraq as they were in Syria in 1958, the Communists appear now to retain one major initiative in the Middle East—the massive provision of arms to Nasser in return for the cotton he is unable to sell in free world markets.

The weapons passing from the Soviet Union to Egypt include the SAM anti-aircraft missile which is also in Cuba; the TU-16 bomber with more than double the range and bombload of the IL-28s taken out of Cuba, and late-model MIG fighters, soon to be embellished with an anti-aircraft missile.

Nasser's acquisition of these implements and his construction of a plant to produce (with the aid of European skills) ground-to-ground missiles are giving the Israelis cause for concern. At best the weapons are adding to the inflammability of the region.

United States policy in the Middle East since the Lebanon landings of 1958 has aimed at sustaining stability in the region. The Soviets are pressing for the disruptions in which they seek their aggrandizement.

This is a difficult and uncertain area, but it is certainly true that the West has fared considerably better than its opposition.

Look, Sobel's column, New York Cavalade,